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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [LI](#) [GH](#)

SUBJECT: June 3 Liberian Refugee Repatriation Update: Ambassador's Meeting with UNHCR Accra Representative

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On June 3, the Ambassador met with UNHCR Accra Representative Aida Haile Mariam, who provided an update on the voluntary repatriation of Liberians from Ghana. Since April, 1,200 Liberian refugees in Ghana have returned to Liberia. UNHCR is working toward facilitating the repatriation of a total 13,000 refugees by October 31, 2008. Ms. Mariam noted that the project is progressing well, but requested additional resources, particularly to support reintegration in Liberia. End Summary.

Repatriation Update

¶2. (SBU) Under the Tripartite Agreement between Liberia, UNHCR and Ghana, UNHCR is facilitating the voluntary repatriation of registered Liberian refugees. The goal is to facilitate the return of some 13,000 individuals (representing about half of the registered population) by October 31, 2008. Since April, UNHCR has returned 1,200 individuals. Currently, they are conducting returns by air, using 200 seats available weekly on regularly scheduled U.N. flights. Additional flights have been made available when possible, including three return flights this past weekend.

¶3. UNHCR additionally noted there have been some spontaneous returns by road of non-registered individuals who are not eligible for the voluntary repatriation, as well as by registered refugees with large amounts of luggage. Recently 7 to 8 returning refugees were injured in a motor vehicle accident near the Liberian border, and have received treatment in Liberia. UNHCR is researching the possibility of facilitating road convoys. They are also seeking to improve the repatriation facility at Buduburam to reduce to one day the current three-day processing time.

Funding Request

¶4. Representative Mariam noted that there have been positive improvements in Liberia allowing successful returns from Ghana, as well as additional returns from throughout the sub-region. However, she stressed that additional support will be needed in Liberia, and requested the Embassy support the USD 3.5 million request from UNHCR. Post noted the issue had been raised with PRM Geneva, and there was no longer FY08 funding available. Ambassador Bridgewater suggested that we work cooperatively with the other Embassies in the region to encourage support for this initiative and begin to consider possible avenues for funding in FY09. Mariam mentioned that she has appointments with the British, Canadians and Danish to discuss the proposal.

Local Integration Prospects

¶5. Mariam believes that there continues to be a possibility for the local integration of the remaining Liberians, including possible issuance of three to six year residence permits. She said that UNHCR and GoG were "on a good track when this thing happened," and

hopes they can resume where negotiations left off. [Comment:
Although there had been some favorable conversations with the Ghana
Refugee Board following an ECOWAS conference on local integration,
there had been no concrete steps taken. Even refugees who would
otherwise be eligible for permanent residence, including those who
have married Ghanaian citizens, have not received residence permits.
End comment.]

BRIDGEWATER